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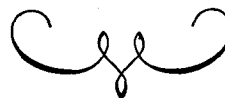
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I do maintain that the Shorter Catechism, with its marvellous comprehensiveness and its faithfulness to Scripture, with its solemnity and its tenderness, is the truest and noblest summary of what the Bible teaches that I have ever seen.

—J. Gresham Machen



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The Redeemer of God's Elect

Incarnate for our salvation, the Eternal Son of God provides the only ground of hope for guilty sinners

By the REV. JOHN MURRAY

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IN THE whole compass of Christian literature, apart from sacred Scripture, the Shorter Catechism holds a unique position. It is the most perfect document of its kind that the Christian church has produced. To assess a document in this way is to pay it a very extraordinary tribute.

In giving such an estimate of the Shorter Catechism we are not saying that it is perfect; it is a human document and is therefore not inspired or infallible. Of all literature only the Word of God is perfect, and it is perfect because it is the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

Furthermore, we must not forget that other works of human authorship provide us with fuller, and in this respect more adequate and serviceable, expositions of the Word of God. The Shorter Catechism is a catechism and a small catechism at that; there are numerous needs which the Shorter Catechism does not fulfill and was not intended to supply.

But there is no other document of its kind that presents the truth of the Christian faith with such precision of statement, such brevity of expression, such balanced proportion, such rhythmical stylistic quality, and such theological adequacy. This is just saying that there is no other document of human composition that packs into so few words such an excellent summary of the truth respecting God and His holy will revealed to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Any one who has perused it with some Christian intelligence must be persuaded that it is *par excellence* a masterpiece of human thought and labour, a masterpiece, too, in those things that concern man's chief end—"to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever." What loss has been sustained by those who in their tender years have not been disciplined in its instruction and in their maturer years have not been fortified with the truth it so effectively inculcates, words of ours cannot calculate.

The Mystery of the Incarnation

There is one answer in the Shorter Catechism that for many years has impressed the present writer as an unexcelled example of precision, brevity, adequacy and completeness. It is the answer to the question, "Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?" The answer runs as follows: "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so, was and continueth to be God and man, in two distinct Natures, and one Person, for ever." The very punctuation should be observed.

Any one who reads the New Testament with the humility of believing devotion and therefore with the reverence begotten of faith must be overcome again and again with the mystery that surrounds the person and work of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As understanding expands and as reverent inquiry seeks to push farther and deeper there grows upon the believer the marvel of the Saviour's person and work. In reading the four Gospels, for example, one comes increasingly to appreciate the repeated expressions of wonderment on the part of those who were the eye-witnesses of the manifestation of Christ's glory. A deep chord of intelligent acquiescence is struck in the believing reader's breast as ever and anon he comes across the exclamations and acclaims of astonishment. "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!" "And the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel." "And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes."

Jesus was indeed man. But He was also truly God. All the marks of humanity! And no less the insignia of deity! What a stupendous and incomparable conjuncture! It was never so seen in Israel. No wonder that at the very beginning of the Christian era Satan should have hurled his darts at the mystery of godliness, and in one

way or another have done his utmost to destroy the faith of this Jesus. Sometimes he secured instruments to deny the reality of the Lord's humanity and sometimes to assail the reality of His deity. By hook or by crook Satan sought to destroy the faith of the church in that which constituted the mystery and the offense of Christ the incarnate Son of God. It is no wonder that the church struggled through centuries of conflict and controversy to preserve the precious truth and to state it in the most precise and definite terms available. It is with profound gratitude to God that we should remember the issue to which these centuries of struggle came in 451 A.D. when at Chalcedon an ecumenical council was able to arrive at a statement of the faith that fixed and conserved the precious truth regarding the person of Christ, that He was truly God and truly man in one person.

In the answer from the Shorter Catechism, quoted above, this cornerstone of the Christian faith is expressed in language which a child can memorize, in language that is unexcelled in its well-balanced emphasis, and in terms that adequately guard and declare the great mystery.

Eternal Son of God

At the outset it should be observed that the person here spoken of is called the eternal Son of God. This means that He was eternally God's Son. He did not become the Son of God. There is a Sonship, therefore, that belongs to this person quite irrespective of His becoming man. There are some people who think that the title "Son" applies to Christ only because He became man, so that, though He was God before He became man, yet it was when He became man that He assumed the title "Son." This view might seem to be in the interests of guarding the full deity of Christ and His equality with the Father. It is, however, an unscriptural tenet, and it really impairs the evidence which the

Scripture presents for the full deity of Christ and for His distinct personality.

If we should deny that the Lord Jesus Christ was eternally the Son of God, then we should have to deny that the Father was eternally Father. For if the first person is eternal Father, it is necessary that there be a Son of whom He is the eternal Father. And this means that the second person must be eternally the Son of the first person. Again, it is in this way that the distinction between the Father and the Son is maintained. It is also very important to notice that, if we deny that the Son was eternally the Son, then we do grave prejudice to the greatness of God's love in sending Christ into the world. The Scripture magnifies the love of God by showing that it was none other than His own well-beloved and only-begotten Son that the Father sent. He must then have been sent as the Son and not simply to be the Son. It is the greatness of such a gift that advertises the greatness of the Father's love.

We thus see how precious a truth

the Shorter Catechism guarded and confessed when it prefixed the word "eternal" to the title "Son of God."

Another very significant word in this answer of the Catechism is the simple word "being." This is what we call a present participle, and how important tenses are when we are dealing with divine truth. This participle means that the Lord Jesus was not only the eternal Son of God but that He continued to be such when He became man. There was no interruption of or interference with the eternal Sonship when He became man. And again we have a striking example of care and precision when, in addition, it is stated or, at least, implied that His continuing to be God is the corollary of His being the eternal Son of God. The one is coordinate with and inseparable from the other.

We are very liable to think that the title "Son of God" suggests that the second person of the Trinity is in some way or other less than the Father. How can the Lord Jesus Christ, we are disposed to say, be both

God and the Son of God? Does not the latter title indicate inferiority rather than equality? It is here that the Catechism shows its faithfulness to Scripture teaching. It is a signal feature of Scripture that, instead of representing the eternal Sonship of the second person as inconsistent with His Godhood and His equality with the Father, it rather teaches that the eternal Sonship implies or carries with it the Godhood of Christ. We have a good example in John 5:18. "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." The Jews quite properly interpreted Jesus' claim that God was His Father as tantamount to "making himself equal with God." That the Jews were right in this inference is shown by the fact that Jesus does not repudiate their inference but rather proceeds to vindicate His claim and to support the inference, namely, that He was equal with God.

(See "Murray," page 316)

A Message to the Church

Opportunity and Crisis in China

By the REV. EGBERT W. ANDREWS

THESE are truly days of opportunity and crisis in China. In their extremity, people of all classes are willing as never before to give Christianity a hearing. For the first time in the history of the Christian enterprise in China, the college students who comprise but a scant one or two hundred thousand of the population of four hundred and fifty million, and whose importance and influence are therefore completely out of proportion to their numbers, are interested in studying Christianity. Many of them have entirely erroneous conceptions as to what constitutes the Christian message, but their interest is an open door through which to introduce to them our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The rank and file of the members and preachers of the Chinese Church are evangelical in their faith. The unpopularity of the appellation, "Christian," has in the past simply not permitted very many to exchange their traditional way of life for one offering as little as does Modernism. This explains why it has been impossible for the modernists to conduct any "national" preaching missions in the cities of

China. Evangelistic campaigns in China are conducted by Bible-believing preachers and everywhere they go they have the enthusiastic city-wide support of the churches.

But now that the intelligentsia are giving attention to the Christian message, the lament constantly heard in evangelical circles is the woeful lack of trained leadership to meet the situation. Returned students from abroad, most of the religious publishing houses and up-to-standard seminaries, the leadership of the Church of Christ in China (a union church and China's largest denomination), and the National Christian Council (China's Federal Council) are modernist-influenced or controlled. With pseudo-Christian and anti-Christian forces trying to get the ear of the intelligentsia and with anti-Christian forces working for control of the masses that comprise eighty per cent of China's population, the crisis is grave indeed.

"Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest."

parable of the tares in support of their position. They interpret—rather misinterpret—that parable to teach that the church may not attempt to separate tares from wheat in its midst. The adherents of this view are exceedingly numerous in our day. In effect they would let the purity, and hence the glory, of the visible church—to use a popular expression—“go hang.”

There is a third view. It excels in balance. One might expect that, for it is based squarely on the Word of God. On the one hand it admits that the visible church cannot be kept perfectly pure. Its most godly and most faithful and wisest officers are far from infallible in seeking to distinguish between wheat and tares. But on the other hand it insists firmly that the church is in sacred duty bound to keep itself as pure as is humanly possible and to that end it must exercise discipline, if need be to the point of excommunication. Did not the apostle Paul command the believers at Corinth to put away from among themselves a certain wicked person (1 Cor. 5:13)? Did he not enjoin his helper Titus: “A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject” (Titus 3:10)? And did not the Lord Himself ordain that, if an offending brother refuses to heed the admonition of the church, he must be regarded “as a heathen man and a publican” (Matt. 18:17)?

The conclusion of the matter is that the visible church is glorious only so far as it resembles the invisible church. Visibility and invisibility are two aspects of the one church of Jesus Christ. For that very reason the visible church must manifest the invisible. Admittedly the resemblance of the one to the other is never perfect. But in some instances the visible church is no more than a caricature of the invisible. Then it lacks all glory. In a great many instances the visible church tries feebly to reflect the invisible. Then its glory is dim. By the grace of God there are also instances in which the visible church concertedly emulates the invisible. Such a church is glorious indeed.

That is a way of saying that the glory of the visible church does not consist of such externals as costly edifices, artistic stained glass windows, richly appointed furnishings, dignified vestments and talented preachers. A church may have all these and yet be so inglorious as not to deserve to be

called a church of Christ. Not even long membership rolls necessarily betoken glory. They may very well evince vainglory.

The glory of the visible church is found in its members and consists in their loyalty to Jesus Christ. That church is glorious which honors Christ as its Head and itself manifests His body.

Editorial

(Continued from page 308)

and in which, as a matter of fact, it has not been implicated.

Moreover, the invitation ignores the fact that the Presbytery of New York and New England, which was involved in this matter, has sought patiently, in a spirit of love and fairness, to deal with the issue. And this evaluation has been before the Christian Reformed Church, for it was published in *The Banner* on July 7, 1944. The Presbytery's statement sets forth at length all the pertinent facts, maintains that it acted throughout in good will and integrity, always endeavoring not to violate the interests of the Christian Reformed Church, and seeking to overcome misunderstanding. It specifically reports, moreover, that when the Classis of Hudson, of which the Rochester Church is a member, gave expression to its grievance because the Presbytery had “received into its communion the schismatically resigned group from the Rochester Christian Reformed Church,” the Presbytery, re-evaluating the situation, conveyed to the Classis its deep regret that “it did not exercise its full prerogative and duty, namely, to determine whether the group concerned, then seeking admission into the communion of the Presbytery, exhibited schismatic tendencies or actions in separating from the Rochester Church.” In the face of this acknowledgment and apology, and in the light of the statement as a whole, we believe that the Christian Reformed Church should recognize that as full assurance as is feasible has already been given.

Perhaps the Presbytery of New York and New England may wish at some meeting before the next Assembly to take cognizance of this invitation, and advise the Assembly of the course it should pursue when the

communication of the Christian Reformed Church comes before it. But at this stage we cannot but reaffirm our regret that the matter was not dropped.

At any rate there are the best of reasons for seeking to overcome every obstacle in the path of closer fellowship and cooperation. Our high calling as churches of Jesus Christ, made more urgent by the times in which we live, does not warrant any party to a dispute to hold out for its own “honor.” For the glory of God and the advancement of the truth to which we unitedly hold, we must go forward constructively. In view of the mutual good will which is generally prevalent in these Churches, we have confidence that the Rochester incident will not be allowed to thwart the encouraging efforts that are being made to establish relations of a solid and fruitful kind.

—N. B. S.

Murray

(Continued from page 310)

Hence the Catechism shows a fine perception that the eternal Sonship and the Godhood of Christ are necessarily coordinate and that since He was and continued to be the eternal Son He also was and continued to be God.

He Became Man

The Lord Jesus Christ, however, became man. How He became man is stated in the Catechism in the answer to the succeeding question. But in the answer with which we are now concerned it is simply stated that He became man. We come now to a very important distinction. It is the distinction between the two words “being” and “became.” “Being” indicates what the Lord Jesus Christ was eternally; He did not become the eternal Son of God. But He did become man. How important again are tenses! His being as man was something that happened; it began to be. Since it was something that had a beginning it was, therefore, a temporal, historical event. Beginning to be can never be separated from time, for time and beginning belong together. So the Lord Jesus Christ became something which He previously was not. The Catechism by the

simplest of terms and distinctions proounds the most mysterious of all happenings, the truth with which our holy faith stands or falls, to wit, the historical reality of the incarnation of the Son of God.

It was man that the Lord Jesus Christ became, not the appearance of man, not superman, not even deified man, but really man with a true body and a reasonable soul. And as a result of what He became He was man. It is not as if He united Himself to another man, not as if He, a divine person, became conjoined to another who was a human person. It was He, a divine person, who himself became man, so that as truly as He was the eternal Son of God so truly was He also man. The Catechism was jealous to say precisely this, for its framers knew the Scripture teaching that He was both God and man in one person. They were faithful to John 1:14 and many other texts—"the Word became flesh."

It might appear to us that Christ's becoming man required in some way or other a transmutation of what He previously and eternally was, a metamorphosis whereby His deity would be reduced or curtailed to the measure of humanity. So many have, in effect, taught. Or it might be thought that there was in some mysterious way a merging of the divine and the human and no longer undiluted deity or unchanged humanity. This has been the tendency of much speculation. But the beauty and adequacy of the concluding statements of the answer of the Catechism appear—"and so, was and continueth to be God and man, in two distinct Natures, and one Person, for ever."

If there had been some kind of transfer of human properties to the divine nature, then the Lord Jesus Christ would have ceased to be truly God. If there had been some kind of transfer of divine properties to the human nature He would not have been truly man. In the one case He would no longer be the eternal Son of God and equal with God. In the other case He would not be of one flesh with us, made in the likeness of

sinful flesh, clothed with our nature and the High Priest endued with a feeling of our infirmities, tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Hence the preciousness of the statement, "two distinct Natures, and one Person, for ever."

God and Man—For Ever

A word must be said about the expression, "for ever." It might be plausibly protested: surely Christ is not now, in His glorified state, man; in any case, surely He will not be man for evermore. Or, it might be said, did not Jesus' exaltation mean, at least, the deification of His human nature? It is true that Jesus was exalted in His human nature; He was exalted in human nature far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and given the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. It is in human nature that He sits at the right hand of God. And it is also true that by His exaltation His human nature was endowed with the qualities that fit it for and are appropriate to that transcendent realm and the specific functions which are peculiar to that glorified state. But it must be noted that it is in human nature He is exalted and, although His human nature is fitted for the supernal realm of resurrection life and activity, yet His human nature is not endowed with qualities that are proper to any other nature than the human. It is surely significant that, when Christ will come the second time, God will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He hath ordained (Acts 17:31). Jesus will come in human nature to judge the world. And the truly human character of the nature in which Christ is exalted is intimated in such a statement as, "who shall change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory" (Phil. 3:21). Jesus' body in the exalted state is no more divine than will that of the saints be when they will be resurrected in glory. The saints will indeed be conformed to the body of Christ's glory and that will mean a glorious transformation. But the glory of it all resides in the fact that the transformation will consist in conformity to the resurrection glory of that same human nature in which the Lord of glory suffered and died.

To deny the integrity of our Lord's human nature as truly and properly human in His exalted and glorified state is to overthrow what is nothing less than the pivot of Christian hope—"then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thess. 4:17). "God and man, in two distinct Natures, and one Person, for ever"!

Hoeflinger — Clark

THE Rev. Herbert Hoeflinger, pastor of the Mediator Orthodox Presbyterian Chapel in Philadelphia, and Miss Doris Clark, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Clark of Vineland, New Jersey, were united in marriage on October 25th. The ceremony took place at 6.30 p.m. in the Covenant Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Vineland, and was performed by the Rev. Everett C. DeVelde, pastor of the Church. A large company of friends and relatives witnessed the event, and attended the reception which followed immediately in a neighboring social hall.

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